

Hi my name is Jess Asmussen. I'm a Park Ranger in Rocky Mountain National Park and today I'm here to talk about the Keyhole Route on Longs Peak. We are going to talk about the best time of year to climb the Keyhole Route, where to start, and when to start. We're going to talk about preparations, changing conditions, and lightning safety. Mostly, we're going to discuss the route and look at some photos. Lastly, we're going to see where we can get information on current conditions.

Longs Peak is a seemingly impenetrable fortress. It just simply catches your eye and begs to be climbed. Longs is a mountain for everyone. Hikers will be thrilled by Chasm Lake, mountaineers will love the Keyhole Route, and rock climbers will be enthralled by the Diamond. Longs Peak has it all!

Hiking and climbing are very popular, but do not underestimate any venture in the areas. These are serious undertakings. Remember, you are responsible for your own safety and you share in the safety of other members in your party. Plan and prepare ahead for your trip and always leave information with a responsible person as to exactly where you are going and when you expect to return. Be prepared with plenty of food, water, and appropriate clothing. Also, be ready for the high altitude. Many folks experience altitude sickness or fatigue-don't be afraid to turn around. At any point on the mountain, you're a long way from home so be conservative. This is not the place to be sick or get hurt.

The average party climbs the Keyhole in 14 hours roundtrip. I'd recommend a midnight or two a.m. start. This will allow you to enjoy the beautiful scenery and make it back down before the afternoon storm clouds roll in. The best time of year to climb the Keyhole is mid-July to mid-September. Regardless of when you climb Longs, conditions can and will change at any time. Winter like storms occur frequently, even in the summer. Be prepared and plan accordingly.

The Keyhole hike begins at the Long Peak Trailhead. Heading up and up, you'll crest treeline at 2.5 miles and pass Chasm junction at 3.5 miles and Granite Pass at 4 miles, and continue to the Boulderfield. This is where things get exciting. Although you've just hiked six miles and have only a mile and half to go, time wise, you are probably about half way, as the rest of the climb is slow moving on difficult terrain at high altitude.

At the Boulderfield, you will find campsites. If you would like to break your trip up into several days, please see the backcountry office for permit information. Also, the Boulderfield is the last pit toilet stop on the hike, so plan accordingly. Once past the Boulderfield, the maintained trail ends and you must pick your way up and around large boulders in route to the Keyhole. As you hike up, gaze up to your left and check out the North Face. This used to be the standard route up Longs via cables attached to the rock on the left edge of the face. The cables were removed in 1973 and the Keyhole is now the most popular mountaineering route to the summit.

Once you arrive at the Keyhole, the exposure on the other side will take your breath away. The best route is marked with red and yellow bull's eyes. So keep your eyes open. They will greatly help you along the way. Take a deep breath and continue along a series of sidewalk like features with great exposure, dubbed the Ledges. You'll continue south and up to a high point and back down as you approach the Trough.

Soon, you'll arrive at the base of the Trough. The trough is a long, slender rubble filled gulley. Be aware of other hikers above and below you, as there is much loose rock in this section. At the top of the trough, you will come to a short step that requires a little bit of route finding and scrambling.

At this point you'll tuck around the corner and cross the Narrows. This is the most exposed part of the entire climb and will demand your full attention. There is plenty of room to crawl and claw your way across the slender ledge.

A few more minutes of scrambling will lead you to the base of the homestretch. At this point you're so close! You can see the top from here. The homestretch is a steep water polished slab that does require some four points on climbing. Take your time and look for the best way.

I won't spoil what it's like to stand on the summit, but I will say that there's plenty of room for everyone. Take a break and have a snack, but don't dilly dally too long, as you are only half way on your journey!

From late may to early October, the climbing ranger staff publishes regular reports on Longs Peak condition. Check it out at the Longs Peak Trailhead kiosk or on the Rocky Mountain National Park website under "current conditions." Also, come to the Longs Peak trailhead and the staff will be happy to share additional information on many of the peaks most popular routes.

Thanks for your time and we'll see you on Longs Peak!